



Charles D. Baker, Governor
Karyn E. Polito, Lieutenant Governor
Jamey Tesler, Secretary & CEO
Jonathan L. Gulliver, Highway Administrator



September 3, 2021

SUBJECT: Northfield – Main Street (Route 10/63), Truck Noise/Speed Limit Concerns

Ms. Andrea Llamas, Town Administrator
Town of Northfield
69 Main Street
Northfield, MA 01360

Dear Ms. Llamas:

The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT), Highway Division District 2 office is in receipt of your letter requesting a reduction in the speed limit and a posting of a sign forbidding the use of air brakes on Main Street (Route 10/63).

MassDOT policy is to not post “No Engine Braking” signs on Interstates or other primary and secondary state highways. As current Federal Commercial Motor Vehicle regulations mandate the inclusion of engine braking systems as a safety and fuel economy device on large trucks and other commercial vehicles, states and communities cannot enact laws that prohibit or restrict the use of these devices by drivers. Therefore, any posted restrictions on engine braking would have no legal standing and are unenforceable by the police.

Typical locations where commercial drivers often use engine braking to rapidly slow down are on sharp curves and/or steep downgrades. MassDOT design practice in these instances is to inform drivers of such hazards with appropriate warning signs (i.e. Curve, Turn, Hill) for the hazard that are supplemented with special plates or additional signs requesting drivers to use either their service brakes or select a lower gear instead. Note that we normally do not post such signs on exit ramps from freeways unless conditions of sharp turns and/or steep downgrades exist on the ramp, or there is a demonstrated issue with truckers routinely using engine braking when conditions don't require it.

We acknowledge that several cities and towns within Massachusetts have placed “No Engine Braking” signs on streets and roads under their jurisdiction. However, in those cases where MassDOT is consulted by communities on this issue beforehand, we consistently advise against installation of such signs for the reasons stated above.

With regards to your request to lower the current speed limits, please be advised that Speed laws in Massachusetts are based on Chapter 90, Sections 17, 17A and 18 of the Massachusetts General Laws. Chapter 90, Section 18 authorizes the posting of numerical speed limits on all roadways in Massachusetts. A prerequisite to establishing (or altering) speed regulations and posting speed limits is a comprehensive engineering study at each location where speed control is contemplated. The purpose of the study is to establish a speed limit that is safe, reasonable, and self-enforcing.

We will conduct a speed study and re-evaluate the speed limits in this area as soon as schedules permit. Please contact District Traffic Operations Engineer Bao Lang at (857) 368-2213 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Patricia A. Leavenworth, P.E.
Acting District Highway Director

BDL 
C – BDL, KJC